

VZCZCXRO7826
PP RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSL
RUEHSR
DE RUEHAH #1120/01 2461234
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031234Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3401
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5619
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3338
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3202
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3862
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3862
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001120

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: "MAYBE" ON STUDENT EXIT

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1070

[B](#). ASHGABAT 1049

[C](#). ASHGABAT 0938

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Foreign Minister Wepa Hajiyeu met with the Charge on September 3 to offer a response to Assistant Secretary Blake's letter regarding recipients of USG scholarships, who have been blocked from leaving the country.

Hajiyeu explained this all came about because Turkmenistan wanted to ensure the security and safety of its citizens and had become increasingly concerned in this area as the number of Turkmen studying abroad ballooned over the past two years.

He suggested that the United States and Turkmenistan conclude a bilateral agreement on education in order to have a more systematic approach to exchanges. Charge noted that there are two separate issues - the students blocked from travel and exchanges, in general. She pressed for Ministry assistance in facilitating the students' exit now, so that those who had planned to study in Kyrgyzstan can study in Bulgaria and the UGRAD students could travel to the United States. Hajiyeu promised to ask Foreign Minister Meredov for a decision. END COMMENT.

[2](#). (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Wepa Hajiyeu met with Charge September 3 to respond to a letter Assistant Secretary Robert Blake had sent to Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov asking that the Minister facilitate the transfer to the American University of Bulgaria (AUBG) of students, who had been prevented from studying at the American University in Central Asia (AUCA). Hajiyeu said that, in principle, the Turkmen government has no problem with students going abroad to study at private or public universities. In fact, President Berdimuhamedov on many occasions had expressed support for exchange programs and for Turkmen students studying in foreign universities and institutes. However, Hajiyeu said, over the past two years, the number of Turkmen students studying abroad has ballooned to more than 20,000, with more than 8,000 students in private institutions. And therefore, the Turkmen government began to pay more attention to this issue.

[3](#). (C) Hajiyeu said the government has to be concerned about its citizens studying abroad. It has to ensure that their

situations are safe and secure. Therefore, they are given contact numbers so that they can be in touch with the Turkmen embassy or directly with the Ministry of Education. And distance is no barrier to governmental concern. He noted that one or two students study in Australia and New Zealand, but the government is concerned about them.

14. (C) Hajiyeve said students should be able to provide information about the educational institutions they attend. Unfortunately, many of the students going to fly-by-night schools could not answer simple questions about their schools. However, more than 16,500 students this year were able to register at Ministry of Education and give the necessary information so that they could travel abroad.

15. (C) Since the United States and Turkmenistan are strategic partners, Hajiyeve said, there should be a more systematic way of dealing with education and exchange programs. He proposed concluding a bilateral agreement that would meet both sides' interests and cover exchange programs.

He said there could be either a government-to-government agreement that mentions the approved schools or agreements between the Ministry of Education and each school.

16. (C) Charge said the United States is not opposed to discussing a more formal agreement regarding educational cooperation, and this could be done within the framework of the bilateral commission. There are benefits to a more regularized approach, and we would want to avoid the problems that occurred at the start of this academic year. Nevertheless, there are really two separate issues. One is

ASHGABAT 00001120 002 OF 002

the fate of the 58 former AUCA students and the five UGRAD students this year, and the other is education exchanges, in general. Negotiating a bilateral agreement on education would not resolve the current problem involving these students. The United States made a commitment to them, and wants to see them finish their education. If the Ministry would facilitate the students' exit now so that they could study at AUBG, the other issue could be addressed over time.

17. (C) Hajiyeve said that he sits on a number of bilateral commissions. He offered that they have their strong points as well as their weaknesses. They are useful for discussing issues over a long period of time and are less useful for trying to conclude agreements within a year. He asserted that separate direct talks on education might be best. Regarding the students, he said that he would ask FM Meredov for a decision on this point. On the way out, Charge reiterated to MFA Americas Department Chief Serdar Bashimov the importance to the United States of permitting the students to depart the country to study in Bulgaria. She said this issue should be resolved positively, so that it does not become a further irritant in bilateral relations. Bashimov promised to stress to Meredov the points Charge had made.

18. (C) COMMENT: Hajiyeve's explanation is the third or fourth version we have received of why the students have not been allowed to travel. In essence, the bottom line is the Turkmenistan government, which highly values control, wants to have greater control over where and what students study as well as what influences they may encounter. There is a concern that these students return a lot less "Turkmen." However, the whole point of exchanges is to expose students to a wider world and broaden their minds. In the case of programs for students from Turkmenistan, it is also to provide an education to some young people, who, while bright and capable, might not otherwise have that opportunity. We will continue to press here for the students' exit and for an expeditious response on this question. END COMMENT.

CURRAN